

## Message Text

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43

ACTION EA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3797

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UNCLAS SAIGON 3077

DEPT PASS TO IBS/NCA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJECT: VIETNAMESE PRESS COVERAGE OF COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE

1. FOLLOWING ON HEELS OF US CODEL VISIT TO VIETNAM WHICH DOMINATED ATTENTION OF LOCAL PRESS THROUGH MARCH 10, COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE BEGAN TO RECEIVE LIMITED COVERAGE IN PRO-GVN PAPERS EVEN BEFORE CODEL DEPARTED RVN. FOR EXAMPLE, DAN CHU AND TIEN TUYEN DEVOTED FRONT PAGE COVERAGE ON MARCH 2 (DISTRIBUTED ON MARCH 1) TO REPORTS OF SIMULTANEOUS NORTH VIETNAMESE ATTACKS IN KONTUM AND QUANG NGAI PROVINCES.

2. BY MARCH 5, BOTH DAI DAN TOC (STRONG OPPOSITION) AND DOC LAP (INDEPENDENT/OPPOSITION) RAN BANNER HEADLINES PROCLAIMING THAT COMMUNIST TROOPS HAD LAUNCHED STRONG ATTACKS IN BINH DINH, KONTUM AND PLEIKU. ON SAME DAY, PRO-GVN QUAT CUONG'S MAIN HEADLINE DECLARED THAT RVNAF STRIKES IN QUANG NAM AND QUANG NGAI DESTROYED TEN INSTALLATIONS AND FOUR GUN EMPLACEMENTS BELONGING TO COMMUNISTS.

3. NEWS OF COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE BEGAN OCCUPYING CONSIDERABLE UNCLASSIFIED

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SPACE IN ALL SAIGON DAILIES BY MARCH 8. ON MARCH 9, DAI DAN

TOC ANNOUNCED THAT WAR HAD SPREAD THROUGH FIVE PROVINCES IN MR II AND ON MARCH 10 CHINH LUAN (CONSTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION) AND MANY OTHERS GAVE FRONT PAGE COVERAGE TO FALL OF THUAN MAN DISTRICT IN PHU BON PROVINCE (MR II).

4. ON MARCH 12 CHINH LUAN DEVOTED HALF OF FRONT PAGE TO NEWS OF COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE. UNDER MAIN HEADLINE PROCLAIMING THAT SIEGE OF BAN ME THUOT HAD BEEN LIFTED, IT RAN DETAILED REPORTS OF EVACUATION OF DUC LAP DISTRICT AND NOTED THAT MANY DISTRICTS IN CENTRAL VIETNAM WERE ALSO EVACUATED. SUB-HEADINGS REPORTED THE SHELLING OF BIEN HOA AND USE OF TANKS IN COMMUNIST ATTACK ON TRI TAM (BINH DUONG PROVINCE). SAME ISSUE CARRIED FULL TEXT OF MFA COMMUNIQUE DENOUNCING NORTH VIETNAMESE ATTACKS (SAIGON 2795) AND RAN SEPARATE AP ACCOUNT OF DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S REMARK THAT COMMUNIST ATTACKS CONSTITUTED BLATANT VIOLATION OF PARIS AGREEMENT AND AN ESCALATION OF WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

5. BY MARCH 15 NEWS OF THE OFFENSIVE CONTINUED TO DOMINATE FRONT PAGES OF ALL SAIGON DAILIES AND EYEWITNESS REPORTS OF PEOPLE'S COURTS AND EXECUTIONS IN AREAS RECENTLY TAKEN BY BY COMMUNISTS WERE SURFACED IN CHINH LUAN AND THE SAIGON POST (SAIGON 3019). STORIES OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES STREAMING FROM AREAS UNDER ATTACK AND COMMUNIST HELD TERRITORY BEGAN TO RECEIVE CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION AT THIS TIME. FOR EXAMPLE, IN DOC LAP'S MARCH 13 ISSUE, DEPUTY TRUONG NHU THIEN APPEALED FOR RELIEF WORK TO ASSIST 70,000 WAR VICTIMS IN BAN ME THUOT. AN EDITORIAL IN MARCH 15 ISSUE OF SAME PAPER ENTITLED PAINFUL CHALLENGE FOR THE PEOPLE PROCLAIMED THAT "COMMUNIST GENERAL OFFENSIVE HAD BEGUN AND FIERCE BATTLES WILL RAGE IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS" AND NOTED THAT "THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PEOPLE WILL NOT REMAIN PASSIVE. EVERYONE MUST GET READY TO COPE WITH SUDDEN EVENTS AND EVERYONE HAS THE DUTY TO DO EVERYTHING HE CAN TO HELP HIS FOLLOW COUNTRYMEN WHO ARE VICTIMS OF THE WAR."

6. WHILE STATEMENTS CRITICIZING COMMUNIST ATTACKS HAVE BEEN NOTABLY ABSENT ON PART OF VARIOUS OPPOSITION GROUPS, TWO NATIONALIST BLOC DEPUTIES IN LOWER HOUSE DID DONDEMN "COMMUNIST SABOTAGE OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT AS REPORTED IN CHINH LUAN ON MARCH 13 (SAIGON 2940). ON MARCH 17 PRO-GVN QUAT CUONG CARRIED UNCLASSIFIED

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FULL TEXT OF DENUNCIATION OF COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE MADE BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT (SAIGON 3043). ON SAME DAY, MAIN HEADLINE IN TRANG DEN (INDEPENDENT/OPPOSITION) ANNOUNCED THAT "ARVN MR II HDQ WAS MOVED" FROM PLEIKU TO NHA TRANG AND ALSO REPORTED IN MAJOR SUB-HEADING THAT "BISHOP (NGUYEN HUY) MAI AND TWO PRIESTS WERE SHOT TO DEATH" IN BMT. ANOTHER SUB-HEADING NOTED THAT "50 TEACHERS HAD ESCAPED BUT 450 WERE MISSING IN BMT."

7. EDITORIAL OPINION TENDED TO REPRESENT POLITICAL PERSUASION OF INDIVIDUAL PAPERS AND RAN GAMUT FROM DAN CHU'S CLAIM THAT "THE UNITED STATES' UNTIMELY DESIRE FOR DISENGAGEMENT..." HAS SERVED AS AN "INDIRECT ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE COMMUNISTS" TO TRANG DEN'S : "HUMAN LIVES ARE PRECIOUS. DON'T LET THE RESIDENTS OF LIVE AGAIN THE TRAGEDY OF THE PEOPLE OF PHUOC LONG." ON MARCH 12 TRANG DEN "WISHED THAT THE LEADERS OF BOTH THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH, AS WELL AS THE LEADERS OF BOTH SOUTH VIETNAMESE SIDES, WOULD LOOK AT THE PEOPLE'S SUFFERING AND END THE KILLING TO AVOID MORE SHEDDING OF VIETNAMESE BLOOD AND MORE MISERY FOR THE POPE." ON NEXT DAY TRANG DEN POSED QUESTION: "WHY HAVE COMMUNIST TROOPS STAGED A MAJOR OFFENSIVE AT THE PRESENT TIME CLEARLY INTENDING TO ANNEX THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AS A WHOLE?" IN REPLY IT WROTE: "THE COMMUNISTS' ATTACKS ARE NOT RELATED TO US\$300,000,000 DOLLAR SUPPLEMENTAL AID TO RVN BUT TO AMERICANS AND THEIR POLICIES. IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT US DISPLAYS INDECISION, LACK OF UNITY OF MIND AND EMBARRASSMENT WHILE COPING WITH US INTERNAL AFFAIRS. IN ANY CONFLICT, THIS PROVIDES A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE ENEMY TO STRIKE STRONGLY AND TO MAKE DECISIVE STRATEGIC STRIKES..." THE ARTICLE CONCLUDED: "OBVIOUSLY, NORTH VIETNAM'S ACTIVITIES ARE AIMED AT CREATING A 'FAIT ACCOMPLI' BEFORE THE US CAN REACT IN TIME."

8. COMMENT: VIRTUALLY ALL INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND SOME LOCAL NEWS APPEARING IN VIETNAMESE PRESS CONSISTS OF TRANSLATIONS OF WIRE SERVICE ITEMS AND ARTICLES FROM OTHER INTERNATIONAL SOURCES. THERE HAVE BEEN SCORES OF SUCH ARTICLES IN RECENT WEEKS. WHILE THEY ADD IMPORTANT DIMENSION TO TOTAL IMPACT OF LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE AND ALSO REFLECT HIGH LEVEL OF CONCERN ON PART OF VIETNAMESE BODY POLITIC TO STAY ABREAST OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND ANALYSIS OF ALL EVENTS RELATED TO VIETNAM, THEY ARE NOT INCLUDED IN OUR REPORTING ON LOCAL PRESS DUE TO SHEER VOLUME  
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INVOLVED AND BECAUSE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO DEPARTMENT FROM OTHER SOURCES IN ENGLISH.  
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